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The Last American Revolutionaries

The revolution we grew up with in the sixties will be back in the news when five men and three women stand trial in Boston for attempting to overthrow the government of the United States.

BY E. J. KAHN III

THE SUNDAY MORNING THE JUSTICE DEPARTment caught up with Jaan Laaman, Barbara Curzi, and their three children, Ronald Reagan was on the verge of his landslide election to a second term. Halloween decorations still festooned the Cleveland, Ohio, double-decker the family had settled into in 1984—their third year underground. A Frankenstein mask and cutout goblins hung in the windows. The porch was made over as a cave, replete with fake spiderwebs. The children had been meticulous in their work.

The weather was cold and rainy, and both Laaman and Curzi were moving slowly, oblivious to the fact that their blue-collar neighborhood was turning into a staging area for one of the largest SWAT teams ever assembled. In fact, there were three teams: one from the Pittsburgh and one from the Cleveland FBI offices, and one from the Cleveland police.

The day before, FBI agents had trailed Richard Williams to the Laaman house, where Williams was visiting. The family planned to celebrate the youngest child's third birthday later that afternoon. The kids had already begun preparing goody bags for their guests.

First came the telephone call. At 10 a.m. on November 4, Curzi—a short, dark-haired East Boston native one week shy of 27—picked up the receiver and heard a voice say, "This is the FBI. Your house is surrounded. Come out with your hands up."

"Are you joking?" Curzi asked, half hoping she was hearing some belated trick-or-treat prank.

Laaman, the father of Curzi's youngest child, could tell something was wrong. A burly man of Estonian descent who had grown up in Buffalo, New York, toiled as a steelworker, and gone to jail on an assault charge when still in his teens, Laaman had emerged in the late sixties and early seventies as a radical political speaker and organizer. He was a student of body language and expression, skills he honed when he first went underground, in 1971. He observed that Curzi—normally relaxed, even perky—had tensed and grown pale.

She hung the receiver back on the hook. It rang again. This time Laaman picked it up. The message was the same.

"Don't do anything crazy," Laaman pleaded. "There are children in the house. We'll come out."

"Send your children out first," the voice on the phone said. Curzi ran to the basement to tell Williams.

Seconds later, the message was repeated over a bullhorn that sounded as loud as the loudspeakers at the 1979 Amandla Concert at Harvard Stadium, for which Curzi and Laaman were both volunteer workers and where they first met.

Outside, perched on the roofs of houses, porches, and garages, were 20 sharpshooters dressed in black battle fatigues. An armored personnel carrier was pulling up to the front door. Police cars blocked off the street. More than 75 federal, state, and local officers crouched in anticipation. They had been stalking Curzi, Laaman, Williams, and five other suspects for years. The FBI believed that this group constituted America's most dangerous fugitives—an armed band of revolutionaries dedicated to overthrowing the government of the United States, a terrorist gang that bombed public buildings, robbed banks, and had on two different occasions shot at police.

The children, aged 11, 9, and 2, came out, and were frisked and taken away. The parents and Richard Williams followed. What else could they do?

"Essentially," says Laaman, "they used the children as hostages."

At the same time, 45 miles away, just outside the small Ohio farming town of Deerfield, another team of agents was arresting Raymond Luc Levasseur, his wife, Patricia Gros, and their three children as they headed to the Laa-

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mans' birthday party.

There were two others the police didn't get: Tom and Carol Manning. Together with their three children, the Mannings evaded the police and eluded capture.

Finally, six months later, in Norfolk, Virginia, Carol Manning felt a gun barrel pressed to her neck as she sat in her car in an A&P parking lot. The FBI had found her. Her husband, Tom, was grabbed at their home 15 minutes later. Even their 11-year-old son, Jeremy, was taken into custody.

America's most-wanted radical group—a revolutionary cell born in Portland, Maine, as the Watergate scandal broke, and believed to be the gang of terrorists that had seared itself into the public consciousness when a dynamite blast drenched a Boston courthouse in blood in 1976—had finally been captured.

"To us," announced James Greenleaf, the FBI special agent in charge of the Boston office, "this is the biggest day since the Brinks robbery of 1950 was solved."

The Stragglers

They saw themselves as the descendants of Rosa Luxemburg, the German Communist theorist assassinated in 1919; of Che Guevara; of abolitionist John Brown; of Emma Goldman; of Steve Biko; of Daniel Ortega; and of all those whites who aided Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad, as well as the civil rights workers who rode buses through the South in the fifties.

They told each other that they lived with clarity, not illusion. They were not romantics, they decided. That fantasy was for college kids, for others.

For nearly a decade, Ray Levasseur and his comrades lived underground as armed revolutionaries in America. Radicalized in the sixties, hunted through the late seventies and early eighties, Levasseur's band refused to concede, or believe, that the country's radical left—spawned during the civil rights movement, grown muscular during the war in Vietnam—had died a social and electoral death.

In some ways Ray Levasseur, Pat Gros, and their comrades resembled those Japanese soldiers who, two decades after World War II, were still hiding out in the caves and jungles of Guam, the Philippines, and New Guinea.

The Japanese called them *zanryusha*, or stragglers. The *zanryusha* refused to believe that the war was over. The leaflets they read, the broadcasts they heard, were all Yankee tricks.

But almost a generation after the war was over, the *zanryusha* were welcomed back into Japanese society as heroes. Levasseur and his comrades have been brought out of the jungle to go to jail.

The group has been accused of bombing the Suffolk County Court House, in Boston; the Middlesex County Courthouse, in Lowell; the Ideal Roller and Graphics Company, in Marlborough; a Revere branch of the First National Bank of Boston; and the Wakefield and Waltham offices of the Mobil Oil Company; and of trying to blow up the Union Carbide Corporation office in Needham.

In New York they allegedly were even more active. There, the government says, they conspired to bomb the South African Airways procurement office in Elmont, the IBM building in Harrison, army reserve centers in Uniondale and the Bronx, a naval reserve center in Queens, a naval recruiting office in East Meadow, the Motorola and the Honeywell offices in Queens, a Mobil office in Eastchester, and the General Electric office in Melville. The group is also accused of masterminding 10 bank robberies that netted $897,000.

At first the group consisted of Levasseur and Gros and the Mannings. By 1976, when a bomb they allegedly set blew up the Suffolk County Court House, they were already in the jungle, underground. Five years later, their group had doubled in size. According to the federal indictment, Laaman, Curzi, and Richard Williams had worked together with Levasseur and Tom Manning in the New York bombings. Christopher King, a black radical from Cambridge, was briefly a part of the group too, allegedly joining the other men in a Connecticut bank robbery.

The early, smaller band had called itself the Sam Melville—Jonathan Jackson Unit. The name honored the younger brother of prisoner-revolutionary George Jackson (killed in a 1971 San Quentin riot), who had been killed during a shootout at the Marin County courthouse in 1970; and Melville, a convicted political bomber who died in the 1971 Attica riot.

On March 2, according to current U.S. Attorney office plans, *The United States v. Levasseur, et al.* will commence in the Federal District Court in Post Office Square. Judge John J. McNaught will preside. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Loucks is slated to lead the prosecution. And Levasseur et al. will defend themselves.

If the March trial follows the pattern of previous Levasseur et al. trials, it will be full of political rhetoric, charged with emotion, and lengthy. Very lengthy. Last March, after a five-month trial, a jury deliberated for 100 hours over 13 days in the Federal District Court in Brooklyn, New York, before finding Ray Levasseur and five others (Pat Gros's trial was separated) guilty on 33 charges stemming from the bombings and attempted bombings of a variety of military reserve centers and companies involved in defense work.

The trial will also attract considerable media attention, if last November's trial of Tom Manning and Richard Williams is any indication. Manning and Williams were brought to an Elks hall in Somerville, New Jersey, to be tried on charges that in De-

ember 1981 they had shot and killed a New Jersey state trooper who had pulled them over for speeding. The unusual location was chosen in part, the authorities said, for security reasons, and in part to accommodate the horde of reporters assigned to the case.

In Boston, the Justice Department is prosecuting Levasseur and the other six men and women, as well as Christopher King, the Cambridge man active with Laaman and Curzi in the staging of the 1979 Amandla Harvard rock concert. Charges are under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO), which prohibits operation of an enterprise "through a pattern of racketeering." The government also alleges "seditious conspiracy," charging that the group agreed to "overthrow, put down, and destroy by force the Government of the United States, and to oppose by force the authority thereof."

"In order to further their political goals," the indictment reads, Levasseur et al. "would and did attempt to bomb and did bomb courthouses, banks, corporate offices, and military recruiting and reserve centers; would and did rob banks; would and did attempt to murder, and did murder law enforcement officers who attempted to interfere with the accomplishment of the enterprise's goals."

In the mind of Raymond Luc Levasseur, who along with Tom Manning is the only defendant who was active over the entire span of the conspiracy alleged in the indictment, no crimes were ever committed. "The way we look at it," Levasseur says, "the indictment talks about the Sam Melville–Jonathan Jackson Unit and the United Freedom Front taking responsibility for a series of actions. We've publicly stated before that we supported those actions. We don't think of those actions, or any actions by any armed clandestine organization, as crimes.

"They might be in violation of certain laws, but we don't think of them as crimes."

But it's hard not to think of him, and his companions, as stragglers.

The Nightmare of the Romantic Revolutionary

When Raymond Levasseur first went to prison, in 1969, Harvard University students were about to go on strike. The students' list of demands ranged from divesting in South Africa to improving relations with the Cambridge community.

Levasseur, a Maine native of French Canadian descent and a fair football player, had gone to work in a local textile mill after graduating from high school. He enlisted in the army at 19. A one-year stint in Vietnam made him eager to learn more about politics and angry at the way he perceived American GIs as treating the Vietnamese. "We wouldn't treat them as human beings," he recalls, "and I was reminded of how French Canadians were regarded in Maine. Northern hillbillies, they called us."

Discharged from the army at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Levasseur enrolled at Austin Peay University in Tennessee and joined the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC). Its emblem—black and white hands clasped in front of a Confederate flag—did not appeal to university officials. When the college refused to allow an on-campus SSOC chapter, and labeled Levasseur a radical troublemaker, he came to the attention of the police.

Levasseur was arrested, and was convicted of selling marijuana to an undercover officer. He says the sale was for $7 or $8. Whatever the amount, he received the maximum sentence of five years. First he was sent to the county jail, then—after he joined other inmates in staging a protest over living conditions—to the state prison. The prison, according to Levasseur, kept peace by pitting blacks against whites, and prison officials were especially unhappy about his tendency to sit with black inmates at meals. Finally, he was ordered to a segregated unit on Bushey Mountain Prison's death row at a time when a moratorium on using the electric chair had been ordered by the Supreme Court.

"I used to call it the nightmare of the romantic revolutionary," Levasseur says of his journey from a marijuana arrest to death row. "My short-lived romanticism dissipated very quickly at that point."

After serving a bit less than two years, Ray Levasseur returned to Maine in 1971. The University of Maine's Augusta campus was recruiting underprivileged students, and Levasseur was accepted. Majoring in political science, he made ends meet by working as the janitor in one of the dorms. In his spare time he returned to organizing, helping to found the Maine chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and worked as a crisis coordinator at a local drop-in center.

After two academic years in Augusta, Levasseur transferred to the Portland campus. As far as the public was concerned, the war in Vietnam was winding down, and Portland activists had turned to other issues, including prisoners' rights. Through the Committee to Secure Justice for Prisoners, and the Statewide Correctional Alliance for Reform (SCAR), Levasseur met others who shared his concerns, among them Tom and Carol Manning, and his future wife, a young woman from Salisbury, Maryland, named Patricia Gros.

One of the eight children of an army recruiter, Gros had graduated from James Bennett High School after spending seven years in a Catholic school with but two black students. Salisbury, in the mid-sixties, had seen its share of racial turmoil. Gros's neighborhood was separated by a bridge from an all-black ghetto of ramshackle houses and streets without sidewalks. Tensions had peaked in the two communities when a deaf black man was shot in the back

by a Salisbury police officer.

When Gros graduated, in 1966, she decided to head west. College was beyond her family's means, and all across the country there was a sense that out in San Francisco something exciting was going on. In 1967 that something blossomed into the "summer of love."

For a few years, Gros, like thousands of other kids, went back and forth, coast to coast, hitching rides with friends. She supported herself by working as a secretary, and occasionally she went to antiwar rallies. In Baltimore she was listening to the radio one afternoon when she heard Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's "Ohio," about the shooting by the National Guard of student protestors at Kent State: "Tin soldiers and Nixon's coming," the song went. "We're finally on our own / This summer I hear the drumming / Four dead in Ohio."

"When I heard that," Gros says, "I knew a nice place to live, nice clothes, comfort, weren't going to do it for me. I knew I had to join the struggle. Whatever that meant."

Gros eventually landed in Portland, in 1972, and fell in with the city's counterculture. Among the activists there, Attica—the New York prison where in 1971 scores of inmates had died in a bloody battle with police—had become a new focus. A leaflet circulated by SCAR caught her attention. After volunteering to work in the SCAR office—Gros was already familiar with the poor community, having been employed as a federal poverty program staffer through Lyndon Johnson's Great Society initiative—she met a good-looking, six-foot-tall ex-convict named Ray Levasseur. Soon they were living together in a communal apartment that Gros remembers as a "street halfway house." A year later they were lovers.

Carol and Tom Manning had also gravitated to Portland. Carol, a tall, dark-haired woman who, like Levasseur, was brought up in a small mill town, met Manning in 1972 after he and his mother had moved north from Boston. They were soon involved with Portland's prisoners' rights group, setting up a bail fund for poor defendants and attempting to document instances of police brutality.

"Tom had done four years for armed robbery," Carol Manning says, "and one day we found *SCAR Times* on our doorstep. That was the alternative newspaper that SCAR was publishing." Through the paper, which was delivered to known ex-cons in the area, the Mannings met Levasseur and Gros. Eventually, they opened the Red Star bookstore.

The bookstore became a lightning rod for the city's political extremists. Its best-sellers were the *SCAR Times* and Rita Mae Brown's novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*. But the Portland police made life difficult. (The police department was rumored to have among its officers a group of conservative vigilantes who called themselves the Death Squad. They targeted high-profile ex-cons like Levasseur and Manning—allegations investigated by the Portland City Council but never proved.)

Levasseur was arrested for permitting an open bottle of beer on the premises, although the charge was thrown out of court. Then a female clerk was raped on the bookstore's premises, the attacker calling her a "dirty communist" as he assaulted her.

Late in 1973, Levasseur and Tom Manning decided to go underground. Gros didn't, choosing to run the store. Carol Manning changed her name and stopped living openly in Portland but remained in touch with her family. By then Levasseur was a familiar figure at protests and demonstrations. He had organized a prisoners' union, and was teaching a community karate class. He broke with SCAR, which he decided had become too moderate, and formed a splinter group committed to revolutionary activity.

"I decided I was going to have to start functioning away from the eyes and ears of the government," Levasseur says, "before I got killed."

Levasseur began building a cache of weapons. "Every day," he says, "I was violating the law. But I was also challenging the powers that be, challenging imperialism, and to put that into practice is going to bring you up to and at some point across the line of demarcation between very public work and very clandestine work. I didn't just cop a fake ID card as if I was 18 and going into a liquor store."

In March 1975 Levasseur and Cameron Bishop, an antiwar activist who'd been on the FBI's most-wanted list, were arrested in Rhode Island. Bishop was extradited to Colorado, and after Levasseur posted bail a month later, he headed west too, to help Bishop prepare his defense.

Colorado turned out to be as overheated as Portland. While Levasseur was in Boulder, the federal courthouse there was bombed. Bishop's defense committee was already closely aligned with the radical Chicano community, and after the bombing, the authorities began taking a special interest in the committee's members. Levasseur, remembering the death-squad allegations regarding the Portland police, decided to leave. "I figured they were going to come down on us," Levasseur says.

A year later, Carol Manning and Pat Gros joined the underground when an informant named Joseph Aceto (later convicted of murder while in the government's witness protection program) implicated Manning in a 1975 robbery of the Lunt's Corner branch of the Northeast Bank of Westbrook, in Portland.

According to Levasseur, they had plenty of company in underground America. "When I went underground," he says, "I didn't go alone. There was something there when I went, and there was a lot more to be created after I went. That was part of the struggle."

Blood in the Courthouse

When the Boston courthouse bomb exploded, on April 22, 1976, Mayor Kevin White and Governor Michael Dukakis were organizing a march through downtown Boston. It was an attempt to defuse the hysteria and anger sweeping through the city in the aftermath of the second year of court-ordered school busing.

At 8:53 that morning, a call came in to the switchboard of the Suffolk County Court House. It was fielded by supervisor Julie O'Connor.

"A bomb will go off in 20 minutes," the caller said, adding, "Jackson." Another name was mumbled, but O'Connor couldn't understand the caller.

"Jackson," the caller repeated. "It will go off in 20 minutes."

Nineteen minutes later, an explosion—estimated to have been caused by six sticks of dynamite—ripped through the state probation office on the courthouse's second floor. Nineteen people were hurt, including one man who had his foot blown off.

"There was blood all over the floor," reported one eyewitness. "I was slipping on it as I tried to help the injured."

Although court officials said they had ordered an evacuation, evidence later indicated that people were still entering the courthouse when the bomb went off. Others said they had never been told to leave.

Part of the problem, officials concluded, had been the call itself. Thomas Eisenstadt, then Suffolk County sheriff, said the court received a half-dozen threats a week. The name the caller used—Jackson—could have meant anything. A black woman named Jackson and her daughter had been stoned by white youths a day earlier; two men named Jackson were scheduled to be tried the following week; and the city was still emotionally wrung out by the "hitchhike" murders committed by an Anthony Jackson two years earlier.

The next day, however, a group calling itself the Sam Melville–Jonathan Jackson Unit took credit for the bombing. In a typed one-page letter sent to the *Real Paper*, the now-defunct alternative weekly based in Cambridge, the Melville-Jackson Unit described the bombing as a protest against conditions at Walpole (now Cedar Junction) state prison.

A scramble ensued to determine who, or what, the Melville-Jackson Unit was. No one on the East Coast had ever heard of it.

John Boone said he was mystified. Boone, who had been dismissed from his job as state corrections chief in 1973 after guards pressured legislators for his ouster, said that "there are no longer any active advocacy groups in this state, as far as I can see. The revolution continues within the prison system, but from the outside I have seen nothing but apathy and complacency. That's why the bombing is a mystery to me."

On the West Coast, however, the com-

munique—as the Melville-Jackson Unit called its note to the *Real Paper*—made sense. Jacques Rogiers, a spokesman for the New World Liberation Front (NWLF), an umbrella organization that included a number of clandestine groups, said the Melville-Jackson Unit had claimed credit for two Marin County, California, bombings including one at the county courthouse in which two police cars had been destroyed.

"The public around here don't get all that excited about bombings," Rogiers said from San Francisco. "It happens pretty frequently." The injuries resulting from the Suffolk bombing, Rogiers conceded, were unusual.

The Melville-Jackson Unit struck six more times—first in Lowell, at the Middlesex County Court House, then at various businesses tied to defense work—but in none of these instances was anyone hurt. The bombings took place at night, when the buildings were nearly deserted. The Melville-Jackson Unit eventually released a communiqué commenting on the Suffolk Court House bombing, saying its timing had been wrong.

"Some of the criticism of that action was valid," Jaan Laaman says now. "I remember reading the second communiqué when it came out. I was in New Hampshire state prison at the time. In the communiqué, they said they felt it was probably not the best target to pick since that was the unit's first action, at least on the East Coast at that time, [and] you ran the risk of not having the warning taken seriously."

By mid-1977 the Melville-Jackson Unit had ceased operations. In December 1982 the United Freedom Front emerged.

The United Freedom Front—whose New York City area bombings Levasseur et al. have been convicted of in Brooklyn—apparently learned from Melville-Jackson's mistakes, and circulated among the media a communiqué explaining what workers should do if they received a warning or discovered a bomb. The Front also broadened its political horizons to include South African apartheid and the Puerto Rican independence movement. Those issues were revived during the Brooklyn trial when Tom Manning's attorney, William Kunstler, asked the judge and jury to treat the group as political prisoners.

"We brought up the issue of human rights," Levasseur says. "If black children are killed every day on the streets of Soweto and other places in South Africa, and this government supports that, that's a language that people can understand."

The Legacy of Attica

In 1966, a little more than a year before Lyndon Johnson told the nation that the Vietnam War and the attendant national debate would not permit him to run for reelection to the presidency, Jaan Laaman went to jail. Laaman's Buffalo neighborhood, mostly Italian and Puerto Rican, was a tough place to grow up in, and no one, including Laaman, was surprised when he was convicted of assault.

Laaman was released in early 1968 and spent a semester at Cornell University as a special student. Then, still on parole, he transferred to the University of New Hampshire. He had begun reading Marx and Engels in prison, and he had joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Cornell. When he got to Durham, New Hampshire, it seemed logical to begin an SDS chapter there too.

By 1969 Laaman was an SDS regional organizer and an accomplished public speaker who addressed high school and college groups. But in 1970, after he led a demonstration against a General Electric recruiter and subsequently helped organize a campus-wide student strike, UNH canceled his scholarship.

Laaman was arrested in a Dover, New Hampshire, high school parking lot during an antiwar demonstration. He had violated his parole and was remanded to Attica 18 months before the blowup there.

"Attica was operating on a very low level," Laaman says. "Poor medical care, no recreation, no training, rotten food. A lot of racial harassment. There was one black guard, and the majority of the 2,000 prisoners were black, Hispanic, or native American. There was an organized Klan presence among the guards. And people who complained were singled out for worse treatment."

Laaman befriended Sam Melville. "We were very close," he recalls.

Released before the riot, Laaman at first tried to speak out about conditions at Attica, but then, frustrated, he went underground. He surfaced a year later, when a bomb intended for the Manchester, New Hampshire, Republican headquarters went off in his hand. He spent the next four years in the New Hampshire state prison, then spent a year in a federal penitentiary. He was released in 1978.

While in prison, Laaman had become involved with the New England Prisoners association, a regional group that included inmates in Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire, college students, and families of prisoners. When he was released this time, he gravitated to Boston, where a friend introduced him to Barbara Curzi.

Barbara Curzi had grown up in Eastie, married a distant cousin when she was 15, and moved to the Abruzzi district of Italy. There she became fascinated with some young Christian radicals and helped organize a protest against the local electric company, in Pescara, as well as an alternative school for peasants and farmers.

Curzi, her husband, and their small child returned to Boston in early 1975. She re-

members being shocked at the racism she saw there. Busing had pushed Boston to the edge, and Curzi and others formed an emergency hotline that blacks could call if they felt threatened.

"One night a call came in, and we went out to the house to offer some protection," Curzi says. "The police arrived, and I was relieved. The kids had bottles and bats. Then the cops began pushing us back and hitting us. There was no one else around, no one to say, Hey, you can't do that. I was a couple of months pregnant, and so surprised I didn't even think to protect myself. All I could think was, My God, you've been living in *fantasyland*."

Curzi and her husband separated, and she became increasingly active in women's health and day-care cooperatives, and in Take Back the Night, a feminist protest that included a candlelight march and rally at the State House steps. In 1979, organizing the Amandla (Zulu for "the power that brings freedom") Concert starring Bob Marley and the Wailers and Patti LaBelle, she met Laaman and Christopher King.

Two years later, when the police wanted to question them about their connections with the radical underground, Curzi and Laaman decided it was time for them, too, to disappear.

Their child was born in November 1981, and a few months later they disappeared a couple of months apart.

The Chase

Six months after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated for his first term, and six months after the Iranian hostages were released, Curzi and Laaman joined Levasseur, Manning, and their families. On June 25, 1981, the three men, along with Christopher King and Richard Williams, allegedly robbed the New Britain Bank and Trust Company, in Connecticut, of $89,000.

For Ray Levasseur, underground life was a constant search for a safe identity. He worked at a variety of jobs, including a stint as a North Country logger. Police claim they nearly caught him in the act, charging that he was the suspicious character who, in the first week of October 1981, was confronted in the Brattleboro, Vermont, city clerk's office, where he was inquiring about a birth certificate. The inquirer disarmed a city detective called to the scene by the clerk's office and then fled. An arrest warrant was issued for Levasseur.

Soon thereafter, according to the indictment, Levasseur and his companions moved south, to the New York area, and began assuming a new revolutionary identity as the United Freedom Front (UFF). That process may have been hastened by the December 21 shooting of the New Jersey state police officer.

In the blazing gunfight that followed, Philip Lamonaco, a former Trooper of the Year, was killed. As this story goes to press, the government alleges that Richard Williams was a passenger in the car and did the shooting. Manning says he had two hitchhikers in the car and that he shot Lamonaco in self-defense after the officer pulled his gun.

Two months later, Laaman and King were involved in another shootout, in North Attleboro, where two troopers were wounded after pulling Laaman's car over for speeding. Laaman was convicted last spring of attempted murder of the troopers; King, of unlawful possession of a firearm.

The public outcry, or the media's, anyway, galvanized the FBI's efforts. To track Levasseur and the others, the FBI formalized a Boston-based task force—Bos-Luc—in early 1982. Thirty-five investigating officers were assigned to the force, which was supervised by agent Leonard Cross. The FBI distributed "wanted" posters showing photos of the fugitives and their children.

Levasseur and Manning's group, in the meantime, grew. On December 16, according to the indictment, they announced themselves as the United Freedom Front, and bombed both the South African Airways procurement office in Elmont, New York, and the IBM building in nearby Harrison. The accompanying communiqué

stated that the attacks should be construed as a protest against apartheid. Over the next 20 months, the government says, the UFF committed eight bombings and attempted a ninth, on Long Island and in Westchester County.

The Justice Department's break came in 1984, several years after a former baby-sitter for Pat Gros had recalled, in an interview with an FBI agent, that Gros had once used an alias in a minor traffic accident.

Gros, a Bos-Luc computer check discovered, had used the same alias—the name of an infant who had died about the time Gros was born, and which Gros had apparently taken from records at Lowell City Hall—to register a pickup truck at the address of the group's secret mail drop in Columbus, Ohio. The drop was put under surveillance, and when Gros arrived to pick up her mail—as she did once or twice a month—she was followed back to Deerfield.

The rest of the revolutionaries were located soon afterward, and the two-year-old Bos-Luc Task Force moved in for the arrests.

Nail in the Coffin

The visiting room at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan is hardly a cheery place. But this morning the five men and women gathered there are celebrating Barbara Curzi's twenty-ninth birthday. Carol Manning gives her a red kerchief. Pat Gros has written a birthday poem for her based on a story about her grandmother in Abruzzi. And the men—her husband, Jaan Laaman, and Ray Levasseur—have brought a cake.

Things could be a lot worse this November 10. A week earlier, the men were in Cedar Junction and the women in Framingham. For the women, that had meant shackles and chains most of the day, even when taking a shower. The *Middlesex News* had reported on the unusual security, but not until Judge McNaught had signed an order transferring them to New York had matters improved.

Now they can see each other, comfort each other, pass along family news, and the women can bathe with free hands.

"The object of this trial," Levasseur is saying, "is to put the last nails in what they think is our coffin." Two years ago, when he was arrested, Levasseur looked strong and fit, a picture of the Vermont logger he had been at one point while living underground. Now his eyes are sunken; his hair is turning gray. "They want us to die in a penitentiary," Levasseur says. "Either from old age in control units, or from some neofascist who will come stick a knife in our backs."

The group is concerned about Carol Manning. She has been designated for transfer to a new 16-cell maximum-security prison in Lexington, Kentucky, where only two other women, both radicals, are also jailed. "They're only allowing you to correspond with 15 people," Carol Manning is explaining. "Your social visits are noncontact, and only one person's allowed at a time, in a glass booth, including children. The Bureau of Prisons says that women will go into this unit that will never leave."

Manning's voice trails off as she tugs at the white T-shirt that, with its embroidery, resembles a peasant blouse. The others watch her carefully. Their fate, they know, may not be much different from hers.

As Curzi turns to her presents, a door to the room opens, and trays of food are brought in. Stickers reading "vegetarian" are attached to each.

"Did Carol say what they found on her when they arrested her?" Levasseur asks, smiling. "Coupons for chicken!"

The United Freedom Front turns to the meals. Then Levasseur has one last thought.

"One thing I want to dispel," he says, "is that we are remnants of the sixties. The clandestine organizations—the United Freedom Front, the Red Guerrilla Resistance, the Black Liberation Army, FALN [a Puerto Rican independence group]—adapted to the times. As Mao said, 'The revolution is not a dinner party.' It's serious business. Our life experiences haven't changed with the times. My mother still works in a nonunionized mill where she did 25 years ago." □